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[EXTERNAL] Deano Olemaun Testimony on ANWR Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing EIS

1 message

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Tue, Jun 19, 2018 at 8:36 AM

To: "blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov" <blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov>

To whom it may concern—

Please find attached a copy of the testimony presented by Forrest Deano Olemaun, Chief Administrative Officer of the North Slope Borough, Alaska, at BLM's June 15, 2018 scoping meeting in Washington, D.C.

Thank you,

Andrew

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**Deano Olemaun (North Slope Borough) Comments on Coastal Plain Scoping.pdf**

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Washington, D.C. Scoping Meeting
ANWR Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing EIS

Oral Testimony of
Forrest Deano Olemaun, Chief Administrative Officer
North Slope Borough, Alaska
June 15, 2018

Good afternoon. My name is Forrest Deano Olemaun. I serve as the Chief Administrative Officer of the North Slope Borough, the municipal government for the North Slope region of Alaska.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about the Interior Department's proposal to develop a leasing program for the Coastal Plain of ANWR.

For a long time, the arctic has captured people's imaginations. The Coca Cola polar bear first showed up in advertising almost 100 years ago. The theme stuck. The modern Coke ad – with the polar bear cub and the penguin chick – is emblematic of our nation's perception of the arctic... the advertisement diminishes the respect this top predator and our region deserves, depicting a ludicrous and, of course, geographically impossible encounter. But it sells Coke. And it sells Conservation too.

Our region – the North Slope – is about the size of the state of Wyoming.

ANWR – on the eastern side of our region – is about the size of South Carolina. The Coastal Plain of ANWR is about the size of Delaware.

ANWR is considered a special place, for many reasons.

Some, in this room are opposed to oil and gas development in ANWR because they want to protect ANWR as a special place. But I hope those of you who come from this part of the country will also appreciate that you are speaking about our homeland and how it should be managed in your opinion.

I hope you will listen respectfully to the opinions of the people who are from the North Slope and from ANWR itself.

Some of our residents, testifying before the Senate Energy Committee in support of developing the oil resource in ANWR, have been accused of “hypocrisy” for supporting oil and gas even as our villages are threatened by the impacts of climate change.

We see hypocrisy too.

We see people who want to protect special places somewhere else where the residents have little power in our government, while all the land around their own communities is paved over.

Adapting to change is how we have survived the last 10,000 years. When you arrived, we adapted. You divided our families among foreign nations, we adapted. When you left 265 men for us to take care of after their ships were crushed in the ice, we adapted and shared our limited resources to return those men safely to their families the following year. You overharvested our natural resources in the sea and then protected them from us? Until we taught you what a sustainable harvest was. We know our land. We are planners and conservationists and change managers; WE HAVE HAD TO BE TO SURVIVE.

Is the Coastal Plain “sacred” because it is the calving ground of the Porcupine caribou? As sacred as your farm land and your box stores I suppose. You would fight to protect them, but not to lose them as a resource. Our residents – are dependent on ANWR for their own survival – Porcupine caribou meat fills their freezers just as the caribou meat fills the freezers of people to the south and east of us. At the same time, the Native Village of Kaktovik – located within the Coastal Plain of ANWR and the only federally-recognized tribe in ANWR – supports a leasing program, and believes that the resource can be developed while protecting the herd.

ANWR is a special place. It is certainly a place worth protecting. But we should NOT be prevented from using it; it is our backyard. Protecting it doesn’t mean locking up the entire region from all development.

We appreciate the efforts to-date of the Department to consult with our local and tribal governments. I urge the Department to continue to consult closely with our communities, as that is the key to developing a socially and

environmentally responsible leasing program that protects ANWR as a special place and protects our people as a part of that place.

I was a proud papa this year as my kids who are school aged, all received perfect attendance in an elementary school minutes from our home and they will attend high school at home and if they choose, they can attend college for free at home. Educating our youth here at home is what those who walked before us envisioned when the North Slope Borough was created just 45 years ago.

Prior to that time, our young people were sent away after grade school from their homes and their culture. They were thrust into boarding schools—sometimes out of state—where they were sometimes forbidden from practicing their culture.

I was lucky. Because of my elders who fought for my right for self-determination, I was able to stay here at home with my family and my village throughout my schooling. I was able to hunt, eat my Native foods, practice my Native dancing and speak my Native tongue. I did so while also receiving a good education and had opportunities to stay in my village after I graduated and get a job.

Oil and Gas development, when done safe and responsible will not kill our culture and our culture will not kill the development of our natural resources. When we find the right balance, they have thrived together, and my kids will be able to have the best of both worlds.

My daughter wants to become a doctor when she grows up, at home. Please don't take that away from us. We don't need your help, we need your understanding. My name is Apayauq and I thank you for your time today.

Atautchikun Sivunmukta!!! Let us move forward together!!